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**Title:** Ethno-regional diversity in Upper Silesia vs the historical memory of school children

**Author:** Adam Bartoszek

**Citation style:** Bartoszek Adam. (2013). Ethno-regional diversity in Upper Silesia vs the historical memory of school children. W: U. Swadźba, D. Topinka (red.), "Changes in social awareness on both sides of the border Poland - the Czech Republic : sociological reflections" (S. 47-69). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



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## **Ethno-regional diversity in Upper Silesia vs the historical memory of school children**

### **Introduction**

Ethno-regional diversity in today's Upper Silesia is the result of the history of coexistence of the native population with migrant communities from different regions of Poland, which has been happening here after 1945. During the period of real socialism, the policies of Polonocentric unification and disavowing the memory of the Prussian, German, Czech and other roots of the region were imposed. Democratic transformation revived the regional movements and activated the civic aspirations of indigenous Silesians. Survey data of the representative sample of Katowice province population obtained in 1996 show the following diversity of their self-identification: the Poles – 63.8%, the Silesians-Poles – 18.1%, Silesians – 12.4%, Germans-Silesians – 2.4%, Dąbrowa Basin residents – 1.4%, other ethnic communities – 0.8% (Bartoszek and Gruszczyński 1996: 21). Sociologists write about the border region of Upper Silesia (Szczepański 1993), about region's cultural diversity (Cybula and Majcherkiewicz 2005), and Silesian "laboratory" (Nijakowski 2004). Today, efforts are made to restore memory of not only Polish, but also German, Jewish and Scottish creators of industry, culture and development of Silesian towns, and regional divisions result in new leaders and associations emerging that call for the recognition of distinct Silesian nationality. Upper-Silesian regionalism has both pro-Polish and separatist face (Szmeja 2000, Faruga 2004). Identity and historical disputes enliven and their implications for collective memory are still poorly recognised, because the memory is always processual and depends on the dynamics of sociopolitical events (Kurek 2005, Maliszewski and Zarycki 2009). So far, the process of ethno-regional differentiation in Upper Silesia is politically constrained by central institutions. During the administrative division reform in 1998, the chance to unite the historical lands of Upper Silesia into one province while maintaining Opole province and creating Śląskie province of the areas of Silesia and

Dąbrowa Basin and parts of Małopolska and the land of Częstochowa, was abandoned. Since 1996, the courts have rejected applications for legal registration of Silesian nationality, and in 2011, the parliamentary committee for national minorities blocked the application for recognition of Silesian dialect as regional language, even though more than 56,000 people declared using it as their first home language and the proposal was supported by a number of regional and scientific leaders as well as some members of the Polish parliament. However, sociocultural sources of these initiatives increase the strength of their impact. The basis of their growing importance was declaring Silesian nationality in the National Census of 2002 by 173,200 people and then in the local elections of 2010, obtaining 9.5% support in the Upper Silesia province and gaining three seats in the Local Government Assembly by the Silesian Autonomy Movement with the participation in the majority coalition and the position of deputy speaker for the movement leader, Grzegorz Gorzelik. Sociologists are critical of the idea of creating the Silesian nationality, but also justify the historical basis for such differentiation of regional identities, which are the basis for determining the individual oneself and his ethnoregional identity (Nijakowski 2004; *Studia Socjologiczne* 4/2009).

Memory is the history of meeting with people, only some of which are our relatives. We wished to meet only a few of them, and many have been imposed on us by history, by the social environment, by fate and times we live in. Memory is always a collective phenomenon, because through language and conversation with those around us we formulate our individual and personal sensitivity regarding common events. In the case of the past, we embrace it by our memory, as the story of people and communities who had lived before us and shaped the world inherited and explained to us by our parents. In the private world, personal family memory connects to the memory of history by discussions of the past, which proximate us the experience of the people close to us and build relationships with them and our place of residence. When we meet strangers, we define our relationship by referring to our own memories of the past and cultural heritage of the communities from which we come. For each individual social memory is the basis to determine one's own identity in the cultural environment. Our memory of the history is continuously created and adjusted for our social identity (Nowak 2011: 12). It includes a set of ideas, judgments, beliefs relating to self-consciousness resulting from becoming aware of historical events, social communities and cultural patterns. Multicultural environment, saturated by patterns rooted in different historical traditions, relates the fates of different communities, coming and going from the region. Today's inhabitants of Upper Silesia are culturally different from the people living here in the 1930s, or before the fall of the Communism, just because they are linked to differently socially-determined content of the historical memory and ignore, as experience that is foreign to them, its old framework. Collective memory is always territori-

ally rooted, it is the memory of one's own place in the local community. It creates a bond of social memory between an individual and a small private home named by Silesians from German *Heimat*. To explore new places and to shape personal roles in the life of the community surrounding us, we use the collective memory that binds us to the history of fate of our political and national homeland. The process of creation of this historical memory is – on the one hand – a particularly interesting subject of study for “Silesian nation” studied by sociologists and anthropologists of the regional ethnic cultures (Nijakowski 2004). If it is possible – on the other hand – to search for a new elements in the Upper Silesians’ historical memory called by Nowak “deliberative European identity” (Nowak 2011: 19).

The foundation of the social identity of each of us is the need for affiliation (Misiak 2009: 81), belonging to a group of people experiencing together their own traditions and values, knowing the differences that divide them, subscribing to the values and traditions of other historical and neighbouring communities, as well as distinguishing the individual's memory from personal, social and historical memory, which is identified as a product of deliberate actions of educational and political institutions. Historical memory is an ideologized dialogue with the past, into which the individual is put by the school, parents, church and social means of communication. These institutions aim to transform personal experience of an individual into the content that values past of its national and political community, built on a patriotic affirmation of one's own country, shaping a sense of social obligations to the community and the achievements of ancestors. An indirect effect of this historical memory transfer is the expectation of affirmation of history of their own communities, preserving and respecting its elements, their expansion and passing it to future generations (Burgoński 2008: 39).

The institutionalization of historical memory occurs in the process of education. Educational system takes it to the many ritualized myths and content of school textbooks and, according to Pierre Bourdieu's theory, establishes symbolic violence of politically dominant classes against the lower classes – including social and ethnic minorities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970, 2006). It is the major reason for our interest in historical memory of the Silesian school youth who, with diverse ethnic identities, functions in a unified education system.

Today school children are shaped mainly by the peer environment, subculturally responding to cultural patterns and institutional norms of nuclear families, schools, church and mass media. Contemporary youth social identity is subject to strong individualization. It is a product of the transmission of patterns of popular culture, being built by global mass media and also by the virtual communication of peer ties shaping smooth reference groups. Researchers investigating the sources of social identity of young people indicate their function of expression of young people belonging to a group and defining themselves in

terms of its value, and moral rules based mainly on imitation. Youths are characterized by the desire for customization, but express it primarily by confrontation with the patterns of adult caregivers, and the high degree of conformity to peer culture models (Mamzer 2002: 85–86).

The value of historical memory in youth culture is triply degraded: the rule of prefigurative culture – fashion and consumption patterns are established in the circles of peer and adult transmitted, according to the theory of Margaret Mead (Mead 1978) by the already described by Norbert Elias in the individualization of cultural, consisting the requirement to communicate their strong individuality in opposition to the reference groups in competing for attention and social marketing success (Elias 2008: 191, 217), and the virtualization of individual identity, capable of shaping itself as a network project, a multicultural and ethnic rather than natural (Castells 2008: 68–74). Elements of historical memory may, but need not be, used in these processes to create their own identity by a young person. They created yet another system of cultural communication relating to the history, namely the coherence between the locality and processes of globalization, which in effect produces a glocal culture patterns.

Castells interprets these phenomena as a form of defensive reaction, which is expressed in urban neotribal communities. Such youth community leads to collective individualism often with offensive attitude towards public institutions that impose universal patterns of minority groups in controlling the operation of individual freedom “welfare state” (Castells 2008: 70–71). Global identity, as well as the identity of citizens, are seen by young people as remaining in permanent crisis. Volatility (liquidity) of their own roots and practices, enhanced by the effect of performance in multimedia marketplace, even produces an excess of patterns available here and now (Grzybowski 2001: 40).

## **The area of analysis and research problems**

The main research question of this study is defined as follows: What is the importance of school and family transmission of historical knowledge for constructing one’s own regional identity, as declared by students from different educational levels and types of schools?

The basis for the answer to this problematic issue is the sociological analysis of the material gathered in a representative survey of school youth in the Silesia province. These studies were conducted with a team of sociologists from the Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia, in December 2008 on a sample of 3,986 students from 140 secondary schools in 23 randomly selected districts of the voivodeship. These studies were commissioned by the National Cultural Centre

of the Ministry of Culture and organized by Foundation for Silesia operating in Katowice. Their main effects are discussed in the book by Bartoszek, Nawrocki and Kijonka-Niezabitowska *Tożsamość młodych Ślązaków. Między patriotyzmem lokalnym a europejskością* [*The Identity of the Young Silesians. Between Locality and Europeanism*]. (Katowice 2009). The interpretation seeking the differences and similarities of ethnic identity traits of young Silesians and Silesians-Poles, defined at the level of their cultural capital, was presented in a paper issued in *Studia Socjologiczne* (Bartoszek 2009: 111–128). The problem of students' interest in history, as a differentiation factor in their ethno-regional identity is a continuation of those considerations, but it was not analysed separately there. I think that recognition of this area will allow us to better understand why there is in the environment of young people such a low level of communication about the history in its general and regional dimension (Bartoszek et al. 2009: 32–34) and how it affects their sense of relationship with the regional environment.

Theoretical assumptions of the considerations over the interest in history among the younger generation of residents of Upper Silesia, refer to the assertions of regional bonds researchers. Observing the dynamics of the Silesian community, they discuss the transition from traditional to posttraditional factors shaping local identity. Traditional criteria for cultural transmission are related to status inheritance and the intergenerational transmission of the cultural resources turned out to only partially explain their relationship to their ethnic roots (Bartoszek 2009: 123). On the other hand, the posttraditional sources may be linked to individualization of ethnic consciousness, which is a projection of resentments and intergroup antagonisms and the emanation of the so-called “costume ethnics,” which was described by Andrzej Zięba (2008: 236–237). If, however, that peculiar fashion for being Silesian formed and served the strengthening of social resistance of the natives of Upper Silesia, then our main question about the importance of historical curiosity among students from different regional communities would be even more important. And yet, today Silesian school children already form the third generation of the region inhabitants, living within the Polish Republic after 1945. So we ask whether, regardless of national-regional origin of their immigrant or indigenous parents, young students have a sense of regional links and define themselves as Silesians? Does such defining has sense, which is consciously referring to the category of regional ties, and from which students receive a deliberate sense of ethnic identity? What are the consequences of making students interested (or not interested), in family and regional history content of regional culture and general history of the country? How does the awareness and a need to know the history function at the private level of social memory of students of different ethnic and regional options? Does regional origin, or rather the level of their individual talents and passion for school have importance for students' interest in the history of the region?



It is also cognitively important to determine the extent to which education authorities and the adult generation satisfy interest of students from different socio-demographic categories and regional communities in general and regional history? We assume also that the cultural activation of the Silesian elites in the region under analysis and the activities of educational institutions that shape the ideological and patriotic attitude of the young generation, become competitive with each other, as forces competing for different content of collective memory. In this problem area, we have formulated further problem-specific questions for our analysis. We want to recognize how the content of the historical experience of native inhabitants of Upper Silesia and the content of school textbooks, as well as multi-faceted media discourse about the ethnic and cultural regional problems reach the young Silesian generation?

In addition, during the studies we focused on the impact of the value of European integration on students, especially openness to the rights of ethnic minorities. So, does historical consciousness of students and their interest in the past of the region have some new references to the integrating of modern Europe? How do values of European integration determine the students' understanding of their place in the historical continuity of the fate of the native population of Upper Silesia? To what extent do they recognize the rights of regional and national minorities to manifest and to maintain their traditions and historical memory? Are school children placed between the local and regional memory, or rather in the cosmopolitan environment or European culture that weakens the importance of the historical roots of their own ethnic community in the traditional political-national and historical transmission?

## **Declared identity of students vs their social characteristics**

The starting point of our empirical analysis is the presentation of the general characteristics of ethno-regional differences and relating them to socio-demographic characteristics of surveyed students. We have already identified them in the source publications, but here they will be specified due to the new goals of our analysis.

Now, surveyed students were representatively matched so that they composed a random-quota sample of inhabitants from two types of counties – lying in Upper Silesia (coded as “Silesian counties”), and in areas outside this region (coded as “non-Silesian counties”).

As we can see in the table, secondary school students feel a clear separation of their ethno-regional identity. Their presence in local communities is a statistically significant variable (Cramer's  $v = 0.387$ ), because almost 87.0% of young

**Table 1.** Declared national origin of students of Silesian province including the Silesian and non-Silesian counties (%). N = 3,986

Autoidentification	Province counties		Total
	Silesian	non-Silesian	
Polish	26.3	18.8	45.1
Silesian and Polish	36.4	5.6	42.0
Silesian	6.2	0.3	6.5
German	0.7	0.1	0.8
German and Silesian	1.3	0.1	1.4
Polish and Dąbrowa Basin residents	0.4	2.0	2.4
Other	0.6	0.3	0.9
Lack of answer	0.6	0.3	0.9

Source: the author's research.

Silesians-Poles and 95.0% of Silesians live in Silesian areas of the province under analysis. Correlation analysis of the declarative identities of students with their social characteristics indicates very clear statistical differences, aligning tested school students to specific self-identification. First of all, we have two characteristic trends, the percentage declaration of being a Polish-Silesian and Silesian and even German and Silesian, increases with pupils' age (from 13–15 to 18–20 years of age by a few percent with accepted significance level in *chi-square* test  $p = 0.01$ ) and teaching a class (in the upper grades there are clearly more – the level of alpha in the *chi-square* test is here more than  $p = 0.001$ ). The conditioning of these declarations in relation to sex is also interesting. Girls slightly more often (by 4.2%) declare themselves to be Poles and Silesians and the boys much more often – as much as 20.4% – consider themselves Silesians (significant *chi-square* correlation at  $p = 0.003$ ).

In the mentioned study, we paid attention to the fact that: “Among other defining characteristics statistically significant differentiating being Silesian and not being Silesian and Polish or non-Polish are: good knowledge of the Silesian dialect, declaration of being a Silesian made in student's close and extended family, participation of someone from family members in historical events, interest in the history of Silesia, and having distant relatives permanently living in Germany (such features enhance its discriminatory impact). Also Silesians were strongly over-represented (17.2%) among students poorly assessing the financial situation of their families” (Bartoszek et al. 2009: 19). Silesian pupils on the average get significantly worse marks at school, while the Silesians-Poles are not much worse in learning outcomes than their Polish peers. Also, the kind of school pupils attend is strongly statistically correlated with their declarations of regioethnic identity (*chi-square* test  $p = 0.000$ ). Main tendency indicates a more frequent describing oneself as Pole in secondary and vocational schools,



as a Pole and a Silesian in the technical and secondary schools, and as Silesian in basic vocational schools, as well as in the technical and secondary schools. The strongest self categorization as a Pole and Dąbrowa Basin resident is present among high school students and profiled secondary schools students (Matura schools with technical courses).

Summarizing the above results, we clearly find visible phenomenon. First of all, with age and going on to higher education classes a sense of own regional-ethnic identity is increasing among students. Negative impact of the mechanisms of cultural capital is visible, which in the case of the Silesian regional groups reduces the chances of school success. Silesians and Silesians-Poles learn less and often operate in schools with lower status. Will we be able to fully appeal to the rules of symbolic violence system described by the theory of Pierre Bourdieu? This seems to be a reasonable approach. What message the Polish school curriculum offers our young people can be better recognized by quoting the main part of considerations of sociologists, from the book on the identity of young Silesians. Before we do that, let us look at the opinions of young people about what criteria they consider as decisive on the recognition of someone as a Silesian. Following Ewa Nowicka, Centre for Public Opinion Research (OBOP), examining<sup>1</sup> social criteria for Polishness (Nowicka 1998, OBOP 2008: 3–4).

On this basis we distinguish two general types of criteria of Silesian affiliation: *the inherent, traditional, based on the characteristics attributed to* (biological – related by blood, supported the principle of tribal and territorial membership, birth in Silesia, belonging to the historical cultural community) and *the conventional, modern that relate to obtained features* criteria (individualized sense of being Silesian, knowledge of culture and history of Silesia; respecting the regional traditions, knowledge of the language, being enrooted in the culture and community of the region). The analysis using such criteria will be instrumental in determining traditional or postmodern understanding of Silesian identity by young people of our region.

The survey highlights a number of identification features, which for the purposes of our analysis will be presented in the next table, depending on the frequency of their indications in the opinion of the main student population of Poles, Poles and Silesians and declared Silesians. Table 2 presents their opinions summarized in two positions that recognize a particular trait as “important” – I, or “not important” – N.

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<sup>1</sup> Social criteria for Polishness, 1988–1998–2008, Centre for Public Opinion Research (OBOP), Warsaw 2008.

**Table 2.** Social criteria for being Silesian according to pupils' indications (%)

A criterion of being Silesian	Poles		Silesians-Poles		Silesians		Total of tested youths	
	I	N	I	N	I	N	I	N
Feeling a Silesian	65.4	17.8	84.5	7.5	84.0	7.9	74.7	12.9
Following Silesian customs	57.7	27.0	66.1	24.9	76.7	12.5	62.0	25.8
Being born in Silesia	50.5	33.4	67.0	23.8	72.8	19.3	59.1	28.4
Knowing the dialect	46.7	36.1	60.0	30.9	80.3	13.6	54.7	32.5
Having at least one parent of Silesian origin	45.8	37.6	61.4	30.1	76.0	17.3	54.0	33.6
Living permanently in Silesia	44.1	40.2	52.5	33.0	72.2	16.3	51.5	35.9
Catholic faith	43.0	39.1	54.2	37.4	52.7	34.4	47.7	38.7
Knowledge of Silesian culture and history	55.7	27.8	63.3	28.1	72.5	19.2	40.0	27.5
Special respect for Silesia	24.0	56.2	32.2	56.4	47.6	42.9	28.8	55.3

Responses calculated separately for each community without the "hard to say" and missing data. In each of the response the correlation with the ethno-regional declarations is very high and *chi-square* test exceeds the required level of confidence alpha above  $p = 0.001$ .

**Source:** the author's research.

The general conclusion is that surveyed students do not have a coherent opinion as to the factors that determine the recognition of someone as a Silesian. Traditional, assigned criteria slightly outweigh the conventional, acquired traits. However, the decisive differences are correlational, which indicate opinions of students declaring themselves to be indigenous Silesians related to the opinion of the Silesians-Poles and Poles are very different. It is the majority of 6.5% of Silesian students who strongly point the traditional criteria for the identification of regional minorities. But for them being born in Silesia and blood ties are less legible than the observance of the Silesian morals and a subjective sense of being a Silesian. Subjective sense of what they feel is for the young generation the single most important criterion for determining their ethno-regional identity. In addition, we asked our respondents a direct question if a Pole and a Silesian can be only one who has Polish or Silesian blood. An overwhelming acceptance of this criterion towards the Silesian was expressed by 22.2% of respondents, and 21.7% of the total students rejected it definitely. For questions related to Polishness, stronger or weaker acceptance of this criterion, 36.3%, and strong or weak rejection of the blood criterion was showed by 38.2% of surveyed students. Thus, the main criterion of the traditional understanding of the sources of national-ethnic definitely lost its position among today's young Polish and Silesian people for a post-conventional criterion of relatively free self-determination of an individual.

## History taught in school vs regional knowledge of students

Without a social mirror – sociologists say, that is, without the others' opinions of ourselves or without knowledge of the history of our ancestors, we would not understand ourselves, would not be able to describe who we are in the surrounding society. So what is today's young people's from Upper Silesia recognition of the historical fate of their region, and the fate of their families? In these studies, students were presented with two open questions to identify three important historical figures or people connected with the past and the past of Polish Silesia, which the student values the most, and then the three most important and most appreciated by the student historical events associated with these collectives. Students had the opportunity to indicate that they do not appreciate any such persons, or any such events. This possibility was indeed chosen by a significant part of respondents – because with regard to Silesian historical figures up 90.8% of students did not mention anyone. However with regard to Polish past 48.7% of respondents did not indicate any valued event. No event of the Polish past was specially appreciated by 52.0% of students, whereas in the history of Silesia, by 85.9% of respondents. Does this data simply show a lack of commitment to exploring the history of one's own country, and especially in the acquisition of knowledge about the region in the vast majority of school children? So the disparity between the references to Polish history and the characters and events in the history of Silesia is significant. It turned out that students declaring to be Silesian far more likely pointed to the Silesian events (23.9%) and characters (25.1%) associated with this region of the Polish-Silesian (15.9% and 10.6% of this group) and Poles (10.5% and 6.2%). Statistically, this difference is highly significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), but it is even more meaningful after capturing the responses of people indicating their heroes and appreciated events. Well, most of the students fairly mentioned characters and events of Polish history. They most often included: John Paul II (45.5% of people), Piłsudski (42.9%) and Lech Wałęsa (16.4%) followed by Tadeusz Kościuszko (9.4%) and Kazimierz Wielki (7.5%). Wojciech Korfanty was the only Silesian mentioned among figures from Polish history, but only by 0.8% of the students. In most types of schools the same characters recurred in the first place. While the history of Silesia really operates only in the minds of a small group of students. As replies to questions about the past of Silesia students attending schools in the Silesian counties and declaring Silesian option or national German regional identity mentioned more often some form of events.

The fact that without major difficulties students mentioned most valued characters of Polish history has yet one more value, as they were almost the same indications as in national studies carried out on a sample of adult Polish citizens by Pentor in 2003 (see Kwiatkowski 2008: 241). According to the state-

ment, school effectively appropriates the transfer of the nationwide history, and regardless of the low level of preservation of this knowledge, the teaching of Polish political history is carried out normally. The vast majority of students have neither idea about the history of Upper Silesia nor awareness of the fate of the heroic and creative facts of figures forming the development of the region in the previous century. This is because the school education almost entirely ignores regional curricula. Polish school still meets the nationwide mission, pursues its unification and the doctrine of education centralized which marginalizes content related to the history and regional cultures. A student in Polish schools does not receive an orderly transfer of regional history. In Upper Silesia, he or she becomes a hostage of a policy legitimizing the Polishness of Silesia, which was shaped by the Communist doctrine of return of the western Piast land to its motherland. As we wrote in the summary of these studies: "Polocentric Code of school curriculum reduces the diversification in local and regional identity of its recipients. Students are becoming players of textbook formulas, for only a few teachers are able to break with the paradigm of communication about heroes and writers, who are important because as caught in the traditional view they *were and are great*. [...] institutional activity of school generates cultural violence resulting from collective interaction, which imposes on the general young public the uniform, ceremonial patterns of patriotism [...]. School degrades local and regional culture, as the unauthorized to presence in the educational process. It is worse because socially weaker Silesian carriers are the victims of symbolic violence and their local patriotism is rooted at the level of juvenile gangs that in the Silesian Nikiszowce or Lipiny terrorize older people" (Bartoszek et al. 2009: 88).

### **Activation of the historical memory of Silesian youth by family**

Today, our memory is filled with experiences stemming from the virtual space, even if it is organized by educational institutions, images from mass-media and Internet networks are dominant. Memory of a young person is constantly updated, driven mainly by the focus on the experience of emotions and sensations condensed into a shorter time, and oriented to current and future attractions. Such memory becomes scarce in inner reflection on the past, anchoring its carrier in the history of the wider community. If we lack relatives that are able to share experiences of the past as a heroic bearers of tradition, we will lose valuable guides of life. And then we are lacking a mirror to build a reflected socially-creative self, to enter ourselves into the fate and the stories of people showing us lost clues of our ancestors. Because such a family and private memory is al-

ways an important link of an individual with the historical memory of its native communities, we asked the surveyed students whether in their families there is someone who particularly cares about the historical memories and family heirlooms. It turned out that this is not a very common practice.

Overall, only one out of three students asked (33.2%) said that there is a person who deals with the past of their family. Students' knowledge about whether any of the family members took part in important historical events (36.0% of such responses) is not much better. The best situation is associated with access to the family relics of the past, which the student meets at his or her home. Such materials with historical content can be found at 54.3% of students from our region. In practice, all three indicators of the history communication in families are not statistically different for the Silesian and non-Silesian counties, nor for the gender of students. Their correlation with age is yet interesting. The age of students does not matter in case of statements that their families have relics of the past, and clearly differentiates the two remaining answers. It is clearly the younger students who more often indicate that in their family there is someone dealing with their past and that they have relatives who took part in important historical events.

Differences between students concerning types of schools surveyed are also statistically significant. Most numerous students giving affirmative answers to three questions are among middle school students and slightly less among pupils of general secondary schools and then expressly less among young people from technical and basic vocational schools. These results clearly suggest to us the importance of interest to the students themselves in the content of the past, linked with the fate of their own families. At the same time a lack of guiding role of secondary schools in shaping those interests is revealed. Secondary school poorly stimulates the search for knowledge about the fate of their own families and students only occasionally show interest in them.

We have also verified these declarations among students of different ethnic-regional auto-identification. As it turns out, the most involved in the maintenance of family memories from the past are relatives of students identifying themselves as Dąbrowa Basin-Poles and Polish-Silesians. Historical family heirlooms are most often in possession of Poles and Germans, but the information about participation in historical events are passed to the young by Poles and Dąbrowa Basin-Poles. Thus, the impact of regional origin is not a homogeneous factor stimulating the interest in the circles of family history of surveyed students. This observation confirms our conclusion about a high personal commitment to the role of students in learning the fate of their own families. How do then their statements of personal commitment to learning about the general history and the history of Silesia look?

We presented the questions to tested students directly about their level of interest in history and a personal interest in the history of Silesia. Mutual cor-

relation of these two indications was obvious. The greater interest the students declared in history generally, the more of them are interested in the history of Silesia (Cramer's  $v = 0.230$ , *chi-square* and has a strong correlation at  $p = 0.000$ ). Associating these students with a very large and large interest in general history as well as in the past of Silesia is only 8.3% of all surveyed students. This means that even among students with the strongest interest in history, the desire to learn the history of Silesia is present in less than every second of them – it is only 44.7% of the 20.0% minority.

In the next table we present the statements of students interested in history in conjunction with their regional-ethnic origin.

**Table 3.** Declared options of ethno-regional identity and level of students' interest in learning about the general history and history of Silesia (%)

Declared identity option	Interest in general history					Interest in history of Silesia	
	very large	large	medium	low	none	yes	no
Pole	3.6	17.3	41.3	30.2	7.6	16.2	83.8
Silesian and Pole	3.9	15.5	36.7	36.4	7.5	31.6	68.4
Silesian	5.4	6.9	44.8	33.2	9.7	40.1	59.9
Dąbrowa Basin-Pole	5.2	15.6	44.8	25.0	9.4	20.0	80.0
Silesian and German	3.6	25.0	25.0	14.3	32.1	21.8	78.2
German	3.3	0.0	3.3	33.3	60.0	0.0	100.0
Other	22.9	14.3	25.7	8.6	28.6	14.3	85.7
Total	4.0	15.8	39.0	32.5	8.7	<b>24.3</b>	<b>75.7</b>

**Source:** The correlation of both responses with the ethno-regional declarations is very high, and *chi-square* test exceeds the required level of alpha confidence, above  $p = 0.001$ .

What draws our attention is that among the major minority population, Silesians and Dąbrowa Basin-Poles there are different approaches, because higher than in other categories of general interest in history is accompanied by a different attitude to the history of Silesia. It is quite natural that Dąbrowa Basin residents, historically opposed to Upper Silesians, are not in the vast majority (80.0%) interested in the history of Silesia. The fact that only 40.0% of young indigenous people declared as Silesians and only one third of the Silesian-Polish students is interested in the history of the region, is very significant. On the one hand, this reflects a declining need to excel in the history of their region and on the other can be the basis for conclusion of a very low level of institutional, school and family's transfer of history. Such result of our study should be a warning signal, especially for local government which organizes the education, that educational projects cannot include a wider range of school youth in exploration of their small homeland history in attractive ways.



Only to a certain degree a spontaneous desire to learn the history of Silesia (the past of the region) is activated in some people from minority communities. For example, none of the constituents of the German young people living in Silesia declared a personal interest in its history. Here we can feel the pressure Polonocentric interpretation of Silesian history. From these data with some caution, however, we can conclude that the interest in history of Silesia is born in part of young people from minority ethnic-regional community, as an expression of searching for their roots and strengthening the accepted cultural identity.

Personal involvement is associated with school teaching by the level of obtained grades. We have a very high correlation in the *chi-square* test ( $p = 0.000$ ) – clearly better school students often declare interest in general history and the history of Silesia. However, the average of this interest is slightly lower among students with the top grades, lower with very good grades, also there is a slightly lower proportion of pupils with very good and top grades interested in the history of Silesia. This result may be indirectly influenced by the perception of their own identity by Dąbrowa Basin residents who receive relatively best grades and are the least connected with Silesia and its history.

Our results strongly indicate a weak transfer of memories and mementos of history by parents and other adult relatives of surveyed students.

We have observed yet one more factor, namely the impact on students' interest in the history of a sense of their own ties with a particular social space. Respondents were asked to indicate which place, which area or what they feel most connected with. From the majority of these we obtained two indications and based on the first of them – as the most important – the main reference we isolated, main tie-creating references that tie students to their wider social environment. They are:

- feeling of kinship with the community in which they live 38.0%;
- with family region (part of province) which they come from 29.3%;
- with the entire country, with Poland 12.0%;
- with the region of Silesia, the province 10.2%;
- with Europe, as a community of EU countries 6.2%;
- other terms 4.3%.

Linking these declarations is so interesting that we present them in the next table (Table 4).

The results clearly show an interesting opposition. Students interested in the history of Silesia are the least interested in general history (history from the perspective of the fate of Poland with Polonocentric image of the world). The highest share of interested in general history are present among those who identify the first and foremost with Poland. It is also important that young people who identify primarily with their local environment are least interested in the history of the country and poorly interested in the fate of Silesia. Here, therefore, in a niche of peer environment, in “their own backyard”, they find a refuge from the general problems and historical ideas.

**Table 4.** Declared options of ethno-regional identity and level of students' interest in learning about the general history and history of Silesia (%)

Ties felt mainly with	Students' interest in general history					Interest in history of Silesia	
	very large	large	medium	low	none	yes	no
Local community	2.5	17.2	39.4	31.5	9.4	20.5	79.5
Family region	4.1	12.0	40.9	37.9	5.0	26.2	73.8
Whole country, Poland	8.3	22.6	39.1	26.0	4.0	27.5	72.5
Silesia, province	1.3	16.0	35.9	36.4	10.3	42.4	57.6
Europe, UE	5.6	16.7	38.5	25.2	14.1	17.9	82.1
Other areas	8.7	23.5	27.8	32.2	7.8	20.9	79.1
Total	4.0	15.8	39.0	32.5	8.7	<b>24.3</b>	<b>75.7</b>

Source: *chi-square* correlation exceeds the desired confidence level above  $p = 0.001$ .

A final interesting element in Table 4 is a very bad signal about the interest in Silesia region and its fate among students who identify primarily with Europe. This community is distinguished, however, stronger than the rest by the orientation in the overall study of history. We obtained a multicoloured image whose shades reveal through the basic topics, namely the weakness of transfer of historical and cultural content about the past of Silesia (region) to young generation and the competitiveness of preferences that in many cases express a preference for history at the expense of the general desire to learn about the history of the region and vice versa. This means that in the consciousness of young generation, these historical messages are not complementary, because there is no continuity between them, and that the references to them have differentiating and identity functions. The direction of historic interest is therefore an expression of the intrinsic distances, hidden under the cultural and institutional framework and ethno-regional conflicts, which are also felt by school students. Elements of this feeling are expressed mainly in the subjective identifications of young people, but some of them are defining, i.e. they are associated with the position of the students' family assigned in the social structure.

## Sources of information about the region's past and history of one's own village

We asked the students where they get information about the history of their town, the fate of Silesia and the entire Poland, asking about the importance of each of these identified sources. Responses are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Source of obtaining information about the history of their village, Silesia, and the country's history declared by students (data in % does not add up to 100, because it could indicate more options)

Where they take knowledge about history from	Own town	Silesia	Poland
Stories told by family members	46.4	26.2	26.1
School	41.2	44.9	77.2
Radio and television	29.8	41.7	72.9
Newspapers	39.9	40.6	66.2
Talks with colleagues	68.1	28.6	36.7

Source: the author's research.

The results of their response are not surprising. It turned out that institutional channels of transfer of Polish history are functioning most efficiently. Most students (77.2%) obtained knowledge from school and at the same time use the information on radio and TV (72.9%) and also gathered them from the press (66.2%). Talking with family members about the history of the country is done by every fourth pupil and talking about it with colleagues or friends is done by just every third young person. However, despite the weakness of communication about the history of Silesia, school, anyway, appears to be the main source of students' knowledge about their region's past. To a slightly lesser extent, the radio and television and newspapers inform about it. This subject is present in the talks of just a quarter of the students in the family circle and a little larger circle of the peers. Generally, you can see here how weak the informal communication about the fate of the inhabited region is. Historical memory of regional events has been sidelined by school students and is not – contrary to the declarations of the students – an important subject of personal interest for them.

Knowledge of the past of the inhabited village is somewhat different. But here the information conveyed by their peers and friends dominate. It is therefore an occasional and shallow knowledge. The historical part of one's own village, described by parents and family members reach less than half of the students. The school activates students' interest in their own village even less. As a result, also this space is not an area of historical reflection including the youth in the over generational experience.

We found that the role of the family, as inspiration to take an interest in the history of Silesia is clearly more important in schools situated in the Silesian part of our province (56.0% of students from this part of it, against 34.0% in the rest, talking about acquiring knowledge of Silesia from family). There is an inverse proportion in relation to school activities in favour of information about the history of the region (36.8% of the students of the Silesian and 49.8% in other parts of the province). The leading role of the family against the background

of the role of schools in boosting student interest in the history of the region is strongly correlated with their national and regional declarations. Only 4.8% of Silesian students indicated the role of the school, and as many as 61.4% stressed the role of the family. In the case of students who declare themselves as Poles and Polish-Silesians the differences were not so significant (the school inspiration of knowledge of Silesia: for 27.9% of Poles, 30.0% Silesians-Poles, and the inspiration of a family for 38.6% of Poles and Dąbrowa Basin-Poles – 41.6%). To the question whether the knowledge of the history and fate of his own family is important for students we have obtained the following declarations: 1. definitely yes – 23.1%; 2. rather yes – 42.3%; 3. hard to say – 26.2%; 4. rather us – 3.5%; 5. definitely not – 4.9%.

This shows a moderate involvement in learning about the past of one's own family. This private family memories of the past really raise a lot of interest in only every fourth young person. "Definitely yes" is said little more often by girls, younger pupils – aged 13–15 years, students with good rather than top grades, more often they are actively religious people than indifferent to religion. In this case type of county (Silesian – non-Silesian, rural – urban), or school type has no influence. The impact of the declared ethno-regional origin and the impact of family conversations about the past, the degree of interest in the history of their own family is revealed. The Table 6 illustrates the established trends. This table confirms two phenomena and strengthens the overall conclusion. We have the proof of importance of documentation of family history for young people's interests development of the fate of their ancestors. But another phenomenon is clearly a moderate range of keen interest of students in their own family history. Such spontaneous interest (without enhancement by conversations with relatives) is quite atrophic.

**Table 6.** Options of ethnoregional identity vs the importance of knowledge about past family for students talking and not talking about it with relatives (data in % counted up to 100 separately for each option)

Declared identity option	Knowledge about family past is definitely important for student who	
	happen to talk in the family about the past	do not happen to talk in the family about the past
Pole	19.4	2.0
Silesian-Pole	21.7	2.1
Silesian	25.7	4.6
Dąbrowa Basin-Pole	20.8	4.2
Silesian German	25.0	2.1
German	0.0	0.0
Other	14.3	0.0

Source: the author's research.

A signal of a weak activating of interest in the history of their families in minority ethno-regional communities is here an important conclusion. Despite this, being Silesian significantly more clearly stimulates an interest in students than the coming from Dąbrowa Basin. However, strong interest in the past of their family in young people declaring German identity is particularly suppressed. Also other selected, or felt, identities poorly crystallize the interest of young people in their own family history.

### A sense of local ties vs students' attitude towards the rights of minorities

Stating a moderate students' interest in the family and regional history we mentioned their weak identification with the region. We asked school students aged 13 to 20 about what events of the past are the most interesting for them personally – asking to point one of several specified ranges. Table 7 presents an overall summary of what emerged from their responses in conjunction with ethno-regional options (they correlate at very high levels of *chi-square* test  $p = 0.0001$ ).

**Table 7.** Declared options of ethno-regional identity and students' level of interest in important information for different reference populations (%)

Declared identity option	Important past events most interesting for students pertain to						
	whole Poland	important to Silesia	my town and vicinity	whole Europe	personally important	other	none are interesting
Pole	47.9	2.4	12.0	14.5	0.2	6.8	16.2
Silesian-Pole	39.4	15.0	16.6	12.6	0.1	1.4	14.9
Silesian	17.7	39.8	12.6	8.7	0.0	0.7	20.5
Dabrowa Basin-Pole	44.1	5.4	25.8	16.1	0.0	2.1	6.5
Silesian German	21.4	8.9	3.6	10.7	0.0	3.6	51.8
German	0.0	3.3	0.0	23.3	26.7	0.0	46.7
Other	13.8	6.9	3.4	27.6	0.0	10.4	37.9
Pole	41.3	10.4	14.0	13.5	0.3	1.9	18.6

Answers counted up to 100 separately for ethno-regional options.

**Source:** the author's research.

We have here once again a confirmation of the intersecting patterns. History is not particularly experienced by students. The past of Silesia is personally appealing to just one in ten students. The bottom line is that it is definitely more Silesians than Silesians-Poles pay attention to the important events of the past

of their homeland. The latter slightly more likely want to learn about their town and its surroundings. They are definitely strongly oriented to learning about important events in Polish history. Dąbrowa Basin residents mostly focus on the fate of their town – which indicates a greater dispersion of the identity – it is stronger locally than regionally. Young German students are definitely withdrawn beyond the indicated areas of interest. This confirms our earlier observations of this small community.

In this context it is significant to indicate by the audited youth which community they feel most connected with. Here is the set of answers of all respondents from Silesia. Their responses are shown in the following list which presents students' responses to the question of who or what you feel most connected with? (first choice):

1. Local community, where I live 39.7%,
2. Family, land, region of my origin 29.3%,
3. Silesian region, my province 10.2%,
4. The whole country, Poland 11.7%,
5. Europe, as a commonwealth of nations 6.1%,
6. Other place 3.0%.

(data of total N = 3,808 – with no “non-responses”)

These studies clearly show that the most numerous young people of our province are connected with their local community, with the nearest environment in which they live on a daily basis (39.7%). Another part of them recognizes the family realm as the most important reference system, i.e. sub-region of origin (29.3%). Only one in ten respondents (10.2%) identifies with the whole Silesia province, as well as with the entire Poland – (10.2%). Also the European identity is visible, but it is not overly large (6.1%). Seeing circles of identification as such, we affirm the dominance of the local reference system in the minds of the young people. It should be emphasized that the category of family land – the sub-region of origin is for the young residents of Silesia a far more important frame of reference than in the case for the overall population in national survey conducted a few years ago (CBOS 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Again, the above indications are significantly influenced by ethno-regional options. Students identifying themselves as Silesians, less than the students referring to the Polish identity reported that they feel connected with Poland. Also in the case of a European reference, only 0.4% of Silesian students indicated it as the first choice. The relationship with Europe was pointed most often by the students who declare themselves as Germans-Silesians (17.0%) and Germans (32.1%). On this basis one can divide students into: Silesians – primarily related

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<sup>2</sup> See *Self-identification and National Pride of the Poles. Message from Research* (developed Mokrzyzewski), Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP), Warsaw 2004 [Signature: BS/162/2004].



to the native lands, and with the region of Silesia; Germans and Germans-Silesians associated mainly with Europe, Poles and Polish-Silesians strongly associated mainly with the close environment (the local community and family land) and with the entire country as the second place.

Polish accession to the European Union has set a new context to the issue of collective identity of the inhabitants of our country. Another dimension of the identity of the next identification with the local community, region, nationality or ethnic group or collectivity of Polish citizens has appeared or been realized. Therefore, we asked students living in Poland about whether they can say about themselves "I feel a young European?" Such wording of the question allows to determine whether living in our country, young people of the region, received an European identity. After analysing the results we find that "nearly 60.0% of students feel young Europeans, including 16.4% who expressed it in a decisive manner, and 43.0% in more temperate. Every fourth student did not, however, had the opinion on the subject, and 15.6% said they had not felt young Europeans (including 6.5% who definitely did not)" (Bartoszek et al. 2009: 37).

## Conclusions

The obtained results clearly show that among the young Silesians there is no uniformity of opinion about the criteria of Silesian affiliation, as in the case of studies devoted to the Polishness. Students do not have clarity as to the factors that determine the recognition of someone as a Silesian. School students prefer the criteria of autodeclaration, individualized choice. But the ambiguity of criteria used in making choices resulted that among the tested adolescents the codes of perception of Silesian affiliation as in comparison to the recognition of someone as a Pole did not shape so clearly. What formerly strongly distinguished the Silesians (dialect, customs, and community levels) lost its importance. Individualized feeling of affiliation does not facilitate the creation of a distinctive Silesian identity among the young people. Fewer and fewer young people speak Silesian dialect, few observe ancient customs, there are more and more mixed families (the so-called *Krojcoki*), there are also people not from the Silesian families, yet strongly identifying with the Silesian affiliation. No greater intergenerational transfer of knowledge about the fate of own family strengthens this state. Loss of interest in the history of ancestors is accompanied by the reduction of the desire to know the past of the inhabited region. Historical knowledge is a school transfer and becomes a formalized collective memory, which does not build a deeper content that links the private, local level to regional and national one. Students' personal experiences are rooted

in the present and they do not require them to broader historical context for successful communication with peers. With this background there are no essential social conflicts between young people with an individualized sense of ethno-regional identity. In their midst today's youth allows various forms of private self to count for them. However, the historical regional and national differences as well as civic selections from the past are not experienced, as the values boundaries or source of normative references. Everyday life of the youths of today is universalized by popular culture and does not compete with the historical lessons, dictated by Polonocentric, unifying narration of school education and historic, anniversary stories in the media.

The problem of weakening interest in history is neither associated with the opposition between regionalism and national identity level nor between national identity and European, or cosmopolitan identity. Well, test data obtained from the Silesian youth are clearly in favour of the thesis of the disappearance of nonethnic identity and weakening of the traditional criteria of ethnic identity. Youths apply subjective and multi-dimensional self-identification criteria. This maintains blurry but natural roots that are at the same time local and national. This allows them to self-fulfill in fluid, socio-cultural realities, but also leads to weakening, and for some almost to the exclusion of the need to actively expand the knowledge of the past of their families and the history of the community which they identify with. Most of them are not provided by school with keys to understanding the local and regional world. The key to interpretation of the history of the country is, however, based on schemas, and gives sufficiently popular interpretations of history that do not help the young people in deepening the habitual beliefs about the roots of their place in the social world.

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## Summary

The paper is devoted to effects of ethno-regional differentiation in Upper Silesia from the particular perspective of elements of historical memory and knowledge about Silesian identity amongst secondary school children. In this region we have a public debate about the idea of Silesian nationality and local political aims of creating it by leaders aspiring to the acknowledgement of Silesian dialect as regional language, and reconstructing the memory about the Silesian autonomy, and Prussian, German, Czech components of local traditions in regional industrial culture.

The main research question of this study is what is the importance of school and family transmission of historical knowledge for constructing regional identity, as declared by pupils from different educational levels and types of secondary schools. Analysis of the data from regional representative samples (on 3,986 students from 140 schools) lets the author to present data about the educational effects of institutional practice and their ideological, patriotic attitude to the historical memory of the young generation. The article also presents the characteristics of the regional identity in self-declarations of the pupils, and family differences by socio-demographic characteristics of surveyed students. Theoretical base for the author's analysis is *habitus* as source of the morals and a subjective sense of being a young Silesian and possibility to fully adhere to the rules of symbolic violence in school system described by the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Today's memory of a young person is constantly updated, driven mainly by the focus on mass media, peer groups, the experience of emotions and sensations condensed into a shorter time, and oriented to current and future attractions.